

Praise for BBC Documentary Our War

Posted by Lucy Aldridge - 2011/06/13 16:54

Soldier's mum praises Afghan war documentary

A MOTHER whose son died fighting in Afghanistan has praised the honesty and sensitivity of a war documentary compiled of raw footage from the frontlines.

Lucy Aldridge's son William was an 18-year-old serving with 2nd Battalion the Rifles when he was killed by an improvised explosive device (IED) as he tended comrades maimed by an earlier blast, in July 2009.

The first episode of the BBC's Our War, shown on Tuesday evening, followed the Royal Anglians in Helmand and told the story of the death of Private Chris Gray, a 19-year-old shot down while advancing head-on towards a group of Taliban.

Mrs Aldridge said she "braced herself" before sitting down to watch, not knowing quite what emotions it would invoke.

"I was pleasantly surprised at the level of honesty and sensitivity used," she said. "Private Gray's family and his comrades should be praised for their courage to release the film footage and share their experiences. I think it will have a great deal of resonance for those who have served on the front-lines, and hopefully will have shown others some of the truths and consequences of conflict."

She continued: "The fact that the majority of that patrol group were 18 or 19-year-olds coming into contact in battle for the first time held a lot of resonance for me personally. It was a mixed bag of emotions watching, but ultimately it has given me a greater understanding of the conditions my own son was enduring."

Mrs Aldridge also hopes the documentary will dispel what she describes as the "callous criticism" that soldiers know exactly what they are signing up for.

"As it went on it showed that even with all the training and all the experience in the world they could not have prepared themselves for what they were likely to encounter in Afghanistan," she said.

In fact Mrs Aldridge believes this type of footage could be beneficial in training soldiers, and would like to see helmet cameras as part of soldiers' everyday kit.

It also, she believes, has a potential application in carrying out coroner's investigations and providing families with answers.

"The camera does not lie," she said. "For families at the moment the coroner only has witness statements to go on. Because of the nature of the human mind everyone sees incidents from a different angle and remembers different parts."

"It happened to me. The first description of the incident with William was completely different to what actually transpired when it came to the inquest."

Mrs Aldridge's only criticism of the programme is that it was shown on BBC Three rather than a more mainstream channel.

“It seems a shame when the point behind this is to bring it to the public’s attention and educate and inform us of what is going on out there,” she said. “I appreciate that the viewing might not be palatable to everybody, but you have the option not to watch. Hopefully they can repeat it on BBC One later in the year.”

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